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STATE PASS USTR FOR IVES/WEISEL

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Top Headlines

Chosun Ilbo
National Assembly Building Surrenders to Violence

JoongAng Ilbo
Five Business Groups Urge Quick Passage of Media-Related
and FTA Bills

Dong-a Ilbo, All TVs
Seoul-Incheon Canal, Capable of Accommodating
4,000-ton Vessels, to Be Completed by Dec. 2011

Hankook Ilbo
Ruling and Opposition Parties Have Final Negotiations Today
to Iron Out Differences

Hankyoreh Shinmun
"Peace Education" to Be Entirely Deleted
from New Ethics Textbook

Segye Ilbo
90% (of people agree): "Special Measures Needed to Prevent
Entertainers and Sons of Business and Political Leaders from
Avoiding Military Service"

Seoul Shinmun
Normalization of National Assembly Depends on Pro-Lee Myung-bak Camp
and Blue House

Domestic Developments

1 The Ministry of Unification said that the number of North Korean refugees that crossed the border in 2008 to seek new lives in the South totaled 2,809, a 10-percent increase from a year earlier. (JoongAng, Seoul, Segye, All TVs)

2 According to a ROK military source, the relocation of the U.S. 2nd Infantry Division has been postponed to 2016 because the U.S. is concerned that the ROKG may ask for a delay in the relocation, as the Roh Moo-hyun administration did, and the U.S. wants a realistic schedule that will ensure that the project is not influenced by changes in the political situation in the ROK, including possible anti-U.S. sentiment. (Dong-a) According to a military source, while the ROK is demanding that the 2nd Infantry Division be moved by 2014, the U.S. is citing the funding issue as a reason why the relocation should be put off to 2016. (Hankook, Seoul, Segye, All TVs, VoiceofPeople)

3 At the end of last year, USFK Commander Gen. Walter Sharp reportedly proposed to the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff that even after wartime operational control is handed over to the ROK military, the headquarters of the U.S. Eighth Army should remain in the ROK. (Chosun)

4 President Lee's diplomatic advisory group, including former Foreign Minister Han Sung-joo, will leave for the U.S. today to discuss the policy direction of the incoming Obama Administration. (Segye, VoiceofPeople)

5 Unification Ministry Spokesman Kim Ho-nyeon said that the inflammatory comments against Seoul in Pyongyang's New Year editorial violate inter-Korean accords that call on the governments not to interfere in each other's internal matters. (Hankook, Seoul)

Media Analysis

Israel's Assault on Gaza

All newspapers gave prominent inside-page play to the Israeli-Palestine conflict. Right-of-center JoongAng Ilbo ran a story headlined: "Israel's Ground Operation Succeeds... Hamas 'Willing to Accept Unconditional Ceasefire.'" In a related story headlined "Coldness, Hunger, Death...Gaza Seized with Fear," the newspaper reported that UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon had asked Israeli authorities to open three border crossings to allow in grain, power plant fuel and other essential supplies.

Conservative Chosun Ilbo reported that despite its promise to support Hamas, Hezbollah did not intervene. The newspaper headlined another story: "French President Sarkozy Actively Engaged in Resolving Middle East Situation, in Stark Difference to Silent Obama."

Moderate Hankook Ilbo headlined its story: "With Israeli Ground Forces Intensifying Their Offensive, Street Warfare Is Imminent." The article also reported that, amid a rapidly rising toll of civilian casualties, controversy is arising over Israeli forces using UN-banned weapons.

Left-leaning Hankyoreh Shinmun quoted a Korean expert on the Middle East as saying that Israel's assault on Gaza is aimed at warning Obama that Israel should take top priority in his policy toward the Middle East.

Moderate Seoul Shinmun and conservative Segye Ilbo carried front-page stories headlined: "Israel Rejects Hamas's Ceasefire Proposal." Segye Ilbo ran an inside-page report saying that if Hezbollah and Iran intervenes, it could lead to the "fifth Middle East war."

Seoul Shinmun editorialized: "The U.S.'s stance is important in making the international community's mediation effective. U.S. President-elect Obama has kept silent on this situation. The UN Security Council failed to adopt a resolution calling for a ceasefire due to Washington's opposition. In order to reduce the suffering of the Gaza residents, the international community must speak the same language."

North Korea

JoongAng Ilbo, Seoul Shinmun and Segye Ilbo reported that the Ministry of Unification said that the number of North Korean refugees who crossed the border in 2008 to seek new lives in the South totaled 2,809, a 10-percent increase from a year earlier.

Hankook Ilbo and Seoul Shinmun quoted Unification Ministry Spokesman Kim Ho-nyeon as saying that the inflammatory comments against Seoul in Pyongyang's New Year editorial violate inter-Korean accords that call on both governments not to interfere in each other's internal matters.

JoongAng Ilbo carried the East Asia Institute's outlook on the North Korean issue. The institute predicted that North Korea may put less emphasis on a military-first system in 2009, ushering in a big change.

Opinions/Editorials

"International Community Should Speak with One Voice about Gaza Situation"
(Seoul Shinmun, January 6, 2009, Page 31)

Although we need to wait for the result of the mediation by the European countries, such as France, the UK, and Russia, what is important in making the international community's mediation effective is the stance of the U.S.. U.S. President-elect Obama has kept silent on this situation. The UN Security Council failed to adopt a resolution calling for a ceasefire due to Washington's opposition. In order to reduce the suffering of the Gaza residents, the international community must speak with one voice.

Obama Diplomacy and Goldilocks' Rule
(Hankyoreh Shinmun, January 6, 2009, Page 30)

There is a fairy tale of Goldilocks and the Three Bears. In the story, a little girl named Goldilocks does not choose hot or cool porridge, but chooses porridge that is just right. Like Goldilocks, President-elect Obama should neither take a hard-line approach nor be too soft on North Korea in dealing with the nuclear issue. Obama's new diplomatic policy drew a lot of attention not only from the U.S., but from nations around the world. He criticized George W. Bush's unilateral diplomacy, stressing the importance of a multilateral diplomatic approach. He underlined human security issues including the environment and human rights, as well as traditional ones such as the military threat. Obama also commented that he would be willing to meet with a leader of a rogue state to address nuclear proliferation issue. Despite his pledge, he cannot help but focus on problems plaguing the U.S. economy for some time. He has to deal with not only the economic crisis, but conflicts in Palestine, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and Iraq. Given that, the ROK is not likely to be the top priority of the Obama Administration. The administration may pursue a policy of managing the North Korean nuclear program, rather than devoting itself to nuclear disarmament, unless North Korea resumes its nuclear tests. This means that the Obama Administration may be satisfied with freezing nuclear weapons, rather than aggressively seeking to dismantle North Korea's nuclear weapons and facilities.

Some believe that a 'bold initiative' can resolve the North Korean nuclear issue, but the regime's fundamental policy cannot be changed with eye-opening suggestions alone. The Obama Administration should neither put the North Korean issue on the backburner nor make haste in resolving the issue. Following Goldilocks' rule, the U.S. government needs to pursue a multilateral approach and international cooperation, while strengthening its alliance with other nations.

Features

Delayed Relocation of the U.S. 2nd Infantry Division
(Dong-a Ilbo, January 6, 2009, Page 12)

By Reporter Yoon Sang-ho

The Ministry of National Defense announced on January 5 that the Program Management Consortium, which manages the planned relocation of the U.S. bases, submitted a final proposal, and the U.S. and ROK will produce a final conclusion outlining an official deadline and costs of the relocation by the end of this month.

"The U.S. and ROK saw no significant differences in their opinions in reviewing the final proposal submitted by the PCM," a military source said. Defense Minister Lee Sang-hee and U.S. Forces Korea Commander Walter Sharp are expected to reach an agreement on the relocation plan within this month.

The PCM, overseeing the relocation of the U.S. military bases in Korea, has put forth a final proposal to move the Yongsan Garrison in Seoul by the end of 2014 and the 2nd Infantry Division in northern Gyeonggi Province by the first half of 2016.

Nevertheless, some people have expressed concern that the agreement will not be reached soon.

Despite Korea's demand to complete the relocation by 2014, the U.S. postponed the relocation of the 2nd Infantry Division to 2016, citing funding problems. In addition, the U.S. is concerned that Korean government may ask for a delay in the relocation, as the Roh Moo-hyun administration did, which is one of the reasons behind the rescheduled relocation.

Both countries agreed in July 2004 to complete the relocation of military bases by the end of 2008. Two years later, however, Korea requested that the relocation be postponed, citing Korean protests as the main reason, and the relocation was delayed until 2012. At a press conference, Burwell B. Bell, then U.S. Commander of U.S. forces in Korea, made controversial remarks saying "The U.S. will fight if the relocation is delayed."

"The relocation project was derailed for political reasons including 'independent defense' or 'anti-Americanism', so the U.S. wants a realistic schedule that will ensure that the project is not influenced by the political situation in Korea," a ROK military source said.

Stephens